

CLAIMS

1. A method for communication via a computer network, the method comprising:

5 registering a plurality of users with a trusted body;

verifying the identity of each user;

10 generating a random identifier for each user, the trusted body keeping a confidential record of the relation between the identity of a user and the random identifier;

15 wherein a user can enter into a dialogue with one or more other users by means of messages sent over the computer network and via the trusted body, and a user remains anonymous through use of its random identifier until such time as the user reveals its identity to one or more of the other users; and

20 wherein the method includes recording the dialogue and using the recorded dialogue together with the confidential record of the relation between the identity of a user and the random identifier to provide a means of non-repudiation of the dialogue by users.

25 2. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the step of verifying the identity of a user is carried out by validating a public key cryptography certificate for a user.

3. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the trusted body verifies the suitability of a user to participate in a dialogue.

5 4. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the trusted body verifies the authenticity of a message sent by a user.

10 5. A method as claimed in claim 4, wherein the trusted body uses public key cryptography to authenticate messages sent by a user.

15 6. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the trusted body time-stamps all messages from users when recording the dialogue formed by the messages between users.

7. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the dialogue is in real time.

20 8. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the trusted body prescribes a set of rules to be followed by the users.

25 9. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein, the users can be any of individuals, corporate bodies, organisations, automated machines or software applications.

30 10. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein a message from a user is sent to an input queue to ensure the

correct order of the messages handled by the trusted body.

11. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein messages can  
5 include attachments in the form of documents to be  
discussed in the dialogue between users.

12. A method as claimed in claim 11, wherein the  
attachments are signed or watermarked.

10 13. A system for communication via a computer network  
comprising:

a plurality of distributed computer systems  
connected by a computer network,

15 a trusted body connected to the computer network,  
the trusted body including:

means for verifying the identity of a user of a  
computer system and means for generating a random  
identifier for a user,

20 a record confidential to the trusted body of the  
relation between the identities of the users and the  
random identifiers;

25 means for two or more users to perform a dialogue  
via the trusted body, wherein a user remains anonymous  
through use of its random identifier until such time as  
the user reveals its identity to one or more of the  
other users, and

30 wherein the system includes a record of the dialogue  
which together with the confidential record of the  
relation between the identities of the users and the

random identifiers provides a means of non-repudiation of the dialogue by users.

5 14. A system as claimed in claim 13, wherein the computer network is the Internet and the trusted body is

an Internet service provider.

10 15. A system as claimed in claim 13, wherein each user has a graphical user interface showing the dialogue and status of the other users.

15 16. A system as claimed in claim 15, wherein the graphical user interface includes a means for viewing a document sent by a user as an attachment to a message of the dialogue.

20 17. A computer program product stored on a computer readable storage medium, comprising computer readable program code means for performing the steps of:

registering a plurality of users with a trusted body;

verifying the identity of each user;

25 generating a random identifier for each user, the trusted body keeping a confidential record of the relation between the identity of a user and the random identifier;

wherein a user can enter into a dialogue with one or more other users by means of messages sent over the computer network and via the trusted body, and a user 30 remains anonymous through use of its random identifier

until such time as the user reveals its identity to one or more of the other users; and

wherein the method includes recording the dialogue and using the recorded dialogue together with the confidential record of the relation between the identity of a user and the random identifier to provide a means of non-repudiation of the dialogue by users.